

Art for Healing and Solidarity in the Covidosphere

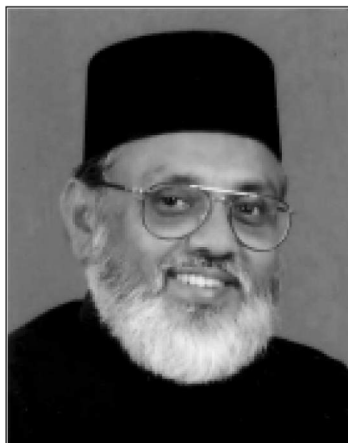
K. M. George

One of the striking paradoxes we observe during the long 'Covidemic' lockdown is that when most human activities stopped or slowed down the non-human nature flourished. When millions of motor vehicles emitting heat and carbon disappeared from our roads, birds broke forth into singing to wake up human beings in megacities like New York. When industrial dust and smoke settled, the atmosphere became so clear that people had the exciting experience of viewing mountain chains like the Himalayas from far off places.

This is an eye opener. It proves once again the long lost

cry of poets, artists, ecologists, futurologists, philosophers and all lovers of nature that all life on earth is fast moving to the point of total annihilation because of the irresponsible human behavior. But planners and politicians, 'progressists' and profit-seekers turned a deaf ear.

Artists across the globe turned anew to nature, the inexhaustible source for all life, for insight and inspiration in the Covid crisis. There has been enormous creativity in the field of art, particularly painting, sculpture and music during the lockdown when artists worked and exhibited online individually and in groups. Many of them responded to the new human



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predicament through their creative productions. Their

works contain in varying degrees prophetic, therapeutic, critical, consolatory and apocalyptic elements as well as sanguine visions of a new heaven and new earth and a social order exemplifying justice, peace and the interconnectedness of all life.

Art communicates far more deeply and effectively than verbal and discursive theology. A lot of verbal fights on doctrine in the history of the Church had been seriously divisive of the Body of Christ and created centuries-old hostility between Christians. The theological word-fight (*logomachia* as it was satirically put by one of the most respected Christian theologians

of antiquity, Gregory of Nazianzus) ignored the metaphorical, parabolic and other figurative dimensions of human language. The linguistic literalism lacked all aesthetic sense. It simply didn't take into account that 'Jesus always spoke in parables, and without parable he didn't teach anything'.

As kindly requested by the Editor, let me present to you three of the seven modest paintings done during the lockdown. They try to convey some aspects of the human condition at the global level. (Please bear with us if black and white prints of the paintings do not represent fully what is described below):

The Snail O' Clock

This is a totally symbolic work. A giant snail's shell is the face of a clock in a cosmic setting. But the needles don't follow the regular course. One of them jumps out of the frame of the clock and tries to point to the cosmic time of night and day repeated endlessly. There the metallic-mechanical needle becomes the leaf of a Bodhi tree, the tree associated with the Buddha's enlightenment. The other needle, twisted on itself, goes round in a cyclic manner first, but finally forks into two needles making the shape of the symbol of Infinity (∞). So the Roman digits on the face of the clock, that are supposed to mark time, become empty of meaning without the two needles that ran away. Even the regular Roman digit XII on top of the dial is ambiguous. Since the 1 stands on both sides of the X we can't make any sense of IXI. If you insist on making some sense it can be 11 minus 1 or



9 plus 1. Taken in itself the clock shows the absurdity of our time and history. (Some devout Christians may see here the scene of the crucifixion of Christ, an event that

lends meaning to history!)

The snail that has come out of the shell is considered the epitome of slowness. It's '*slug-gishness*' is universally deplored by us moderns in our age of the adoration of speed. Our current technology is seeking speedier and speedier ways of conquering time and space from Wi-Fi to space travel. (The irony is that the Corona virus has travelled globally by air by means of our speediest vehicle, the airplane, -space shuttles apart-, and consequently all aircrafts had to be grounded). The snail with its powerful sensors discerns the hazy future and quietly moves into it on the wheel of Dharma (*Dharma chakra*) with all that it implies for a new ethics and conduct of life and radically different order of the world. Ever since the invention of the wheel, considered as a revolutionary transition point for human civilization, our world has been moving on the wheel of ever new technology.

The Sunset



A rather dismal scenario of a future city, sort of ghost city. Symbolically, it is the sunset of our great urban civilization. Actually, this work is not a flat painting as seen in the picture. The background with splendid colours of a sunset is painted on a flat canvas. But the tall ruined skyscrapers, relics of a glorious past, are real rotten tree bark taken from different logs of old wood. So the work looks projected and three-dimensional. There is a white church building, equally ruined, in the middle. In several western cities like New York one can still see very old cathedrals, once the tallest buildings in the city, but now dwarfed by surrounding skyscrapers. The colourful sunset is always there, even when all human construction and civilization rise and fall. Nature remains unperturbed.

The Blessed Medicinal Plant

In the ancient Syriac liturgical text attributed to St James of Jerusalem Jesus is called "**the Blessed Plant (Root)**" that by its sweet fragrance dispelled the bad odour of evil and brought healing to all. This idea inspired the painting. The plant (root) actually rises from beyond the very foundation of the world, and its two leaves are stretched out to heaven like arms interceding for the whole world. The theme is inspired by the pervasive *Covidophobia* and the desperate search for healing and wholeness.

(Fr. Dr. K. M. George is member of a team of artists called CARP - Company of Artists for Radiating Peace. As part of their commitment to peace-building through art they conduct free art workshops for school children. In this article some words like *covidosphere*, *covidemic* and *covidophobia* are newly coined, assuming that they are self-explanatory).

